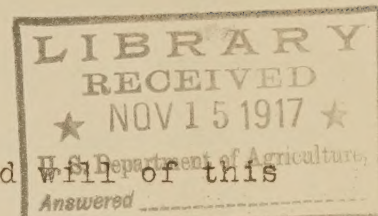


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ADDRESS OF DAVID F. HOUSTON, SECRETARY OF
AGRICULTURE, BEFORE THE THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL
CONVENTION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERI-
CAN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES AND EXPERIMENT
STATIONS, AT WASHINGTON, D. C.,
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 1917.



By reason of the persistent kindness and good will of this Association, the custom of having the Secretary of Agriculture appear before it has become almost as fixed and compelling as a custom of the Constitution. I hope that the custom will not grow stale or be changed, at least so long as I occupy the Federal office. It is always a privilege and an inspiration to meet the members of this body. My only regret is that I am able to be present at your meetings so short a time and that I have so little opportunity to meet the members individually.

According to the calendar, it is almost a year to the day since my last meeting with you. Judged by the experiences through which we have passed, it seems more like a generation. Then this country was at peace, though its patience was being sorely tried. Now it is at war for reasons which I need not discuss before this body. It had no alternative. It either had to fight or to admit that it had no honor, was not a free Nation, and would henceforth be subjected to a medieval power that in the last analysis knows no law but might. The Nation was living on a peace basis and had organized itself accordingly. It was not fully prepared for war in any respect; but it was fortunately circumstanced in the character of its agricultural organization and the number and efficiency of its expert agencies. In fact,

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in efficient machinery for directing agricultural activity as represented by the land grant colleges, the Federal Department of Agriculture, farmers' organizations, and its alert and patriotic rural population, it excelled any other two or three nations in the world combined. The Nation may well pride itself on the fact that it had had the foresight generations ago to lay deep its agricultural foundations. I congratulate the representatives of the land grant colleges on the fine opportunity for service presented to them and on the splendid way in which they have seized it. The Department of Agriculture has had great comfort in the thought that these institutions, ably planned and wisely directed, existed in every part of the Nation and stood ready not only to place themselves at the service of the National Government but also to take the initiative in a vast number of directions.

When a state of war was declared on April 6, the food situation was unsatisfactory. The need of action was urgent and the appeal for direction was insistent. The Nation looked for guidance primarily to the Federal Department and to the State agencies which it had so liberally supported for many generations. It was not disappointed. In a two-days' session at St. Louis, the trained agricultural officers of the country conceived and devised a program of legislation, organization, and practice the essential features of which have not been successfully questioned and the substantial part of which have been enacted into law and set in operation. This great Democracy revealed its inherent strength. Initiative was not wanting in any part of

the Union. Effective organization quickly sprang up in all the States and the services of experts everywhere immediately were made available. The response of the farmers was prompt and energetic and the results are that crop yields have been abnormally large and the Nation is able not only to feed itself but in considerable measure to supply the needs of those with whom we are cooperating.

Of course there were delays. The process of legislation was unconscionably prolonged; but, in the end, action was generous and adequate. There have been confusions also -- confusions of agencies, and, to some extent, of purpose. New forces have been set in operation suddenly and new machinery created. As time has passed, better adjustments have been effected and in the future more complete coordination will undoubtedly be secured.

To the normal forces of the Government dealing with agriculture and rural problems, there has been added an emergency agency with great and unusual powers, with enormous possibilities for good, and with a remarkable record of achievements already to its credit. It has enlisted in its ranks men of wide experience, fine spirit, and high ideals, many of whom are gladly volunteering their services for the common cause. I refer to the Food Administration under the direction of Mr. Hoover.

The relation between this agency and the other organized agricultural forces of the Nation is intimate and fundamental. It is impossible completely to disassociate them, and it would be undesirable to do so.

The problem in part is a common one; and it is of the first importance that the work be done in the closest cooperation and with an eye single for the public good. There is no need for undue duplication of effort and no causes of friction which can not be removed through an intelligent conception by each agency of the powers and purposes of all and by a spirit of mutual accommodation. In a broad way, it is agreed that the prime function of the Department of Agriculture shall be the stimulation of production, the conservation of products on the farm through all the normal and approved processes, the promotion of better marketing and distribution of products from the farms to the markets, the prosecution of the work in home economics along usual lines, the dissemination of information, and the extension of all these activities as authorized by law. In a similar way, the principal function of the Food Administration is the control and regulation of commercial distribution of foods, that is, of products which have reached the markets, are in the channels of distribution or in the hands of consumers, their conservation by consumers, the elimination of waste, and the handling of foods and feeds in the market by legal means through its regular officials as well as through its volunteer agencies. In the main, the Department of Agriculture deals with all the processes of farming up to the time products reach the market, till they are in the requisite form for consumption and are available for the purpose.. At this point the Food Administration enters and exercises its wide powers of

regulation, direction, and suggestion. Where the Food Administration through its powers can be of assistance to the Department of Agriculture in its field, it is at liberty freely to make suggestion, and, when necessary, to cooperate in execution; and the same relation obtains as to the Department's participation in Food Administration matters in which it has a vital interest and towards the promotion of which it can be of assistance. This is the substance of the agreement originally entered into between the Food Administration and the Department of Agriculture and will be more satisfactorily observed as the agents and divisions of the two Departments familiarize themselves more fully with their tasks and with the prescribed lines of effort.

Obviously the making of a program for the agricultural activities of the Nation did not end with the St. Louis conference. Thought, action, and cooperation between the members of this association and other State agencies on the one hand and the Federal Department on the other have been continuous. Attention has been given without cessation to problems in the field of labor. It was obvious that difficulties would be presented and that apprehension would run beyond the actual condition. An army could not be raised without taking men from every field of activity; and it would have been unfair to any class of workers in the community to have proposed its exemption. It was impossible in the haste of the first draft satisfactorily to work out in detail the principle of selec-

tive service; but, nevertheless, under the regulations, consideration was given throughout by exemption boards and by the officers of the War Department to the needs of agriculture. With ampler time at its disposal, the War Department has worked out a system of classification which gives due regard to the necessity of retaining skilled farmers and expert agricultural leaders on the farms and ranches and in the educational and administrative services. No less a burden in certain sections was imposed by the redirection of industry and the large calls made for skilled labor in essential manufacturing enterprises.

The problem confronting us in this field was not, and is not, an easy one. To its solution the Department of Labor, the Department of Agriculture, and many State agencies are giving constant thought. The Department of Agriculture has placed in each State an officer whose sole duty it is to assist in the mobilization of labor in the rural districts, in the distribution of it from places where it is not temporarily employed to places where it is urgently needed, in the fuller utilization of forms of labor not heretofore fully employed, and in securing more perfect cooperation among farmers in the same district. The Department of Labor has undertaken to make available not only for industrial but also for rural undertakings urban labor which is at the time disengaged. The problem is one for constructive handling. I am confident that with the assistance of all the organized agencies and the alert and cooperative action of the farmers of the Nation the situation can be met and that those remaining on the farms can produce as much or more than has heretofore been available.

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This is the aim before us and it must be attained.

The pressing problems of the spring season were scarcely out of the way before the program for the approaching fall was taken under consideration. The question presented was how to get ready for the immediate future and for the ensuing year. A committee of experts was appointed in the department to make suggestions for future action, especially with reference to winter wheat planting. The matter was considered from every angle. After a tentative conclusion was reached regarding wheat and rye, it was transmitted to the experts of the different States for criticism and suggestion, and as a result, it was finally determined to propose the planting of 47,337,000 acres of winter wheat and 5,131,000 acres of rye. The proposals were then brought to the attention of the grain farmers and five conferences were held in different sections of the country. A campaign to make the proposals effective was then entered upon. The actual results can not be determined at this time, but early reports indicate that farmers intended to increase their wheat acreage by ten per cent and rye by three, and those received later are to the effect that there has been an increase in nearly every State of the Union.

In somewhat similar manner the highly important problem of increasing the number of live stock of all kinds and of insuring a very much greater supply of meats and fats was promptly attacked. Conferences were held with experts and leading stockmen of the Nation and the lines of action suggested are being vigor-

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I shall not offend you by attempting to impress upon you the need of continued effort to increase production and to promote conservation and economy. There must be no breakdown on the farm -- no failure of foods, feedstuffs and clothing. The duty is pressing of furnishing abundant supplies for our own people, and in large measure, for the peoples with whom we are associating. The necessity of increasing production and of saving is no less important in all other directions. A Nation pays for a war as it proceeds. Whether it acquires control of the wealth through taxes or through loans, it nevertheless meets the burden at the time, and the extent of the burden it can bear, if it is not to retrogress, is measured in the main by its savings. The fact that part of the people instead of all the people temporarily directly bear the burden makes no essential difference in the argument. There is sufficient justification for securing control of wealth in part through loans rather than entirely through taxation, but the fact remains that the burden is borne by the Nation as a whole at the time. It is not transferred to future generations. An obligation merely is incurred by all the people subsequently to reimburse those whose means were placed at the disposal of the Nation. Two things therefore are of the utmost importance -- to bend every effort to increase production and to be equally alert and efficient in effecting savings.

Let us then continue our efforts with unabated zeal. I am confident that we shall not fail to receive the necessary support. No estimates have been made as yet for the continuance of the operations carried on under the Food Production Act. It has seemed wiser to await developments. If the war lasts and it appears desirable to continue the emergency activities, estimates will be submitted in ample season and I have no doubt that the Congress will make available such appropriations as the circumstances may require.

This struggle is one which calls not only for enormous resources but also for invincible determination and endurance. It is a test even more of the spirit than of physical strength. That we have the physical resources in larger measure than any other Nation in the world is a matter of common knowledge. We not yet fully realize the enormous power of the Nation. If in the Sixties, when we were a simple, crude, undeveloped Nation, doing things, relatively speaking, on an "ox-cart" basis, with the question yet undetermined whether we were to be one Nation or two, we could wage the mightiest war up to that time and issue from it with unrivalled power, what can we not do today, with a united people and with immeasurably greater resources, if our spirit is right and our purpose is steadfast.

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Unless the descendants of the men who followed Grant and Lee are degenerate there can be no question of the ultimate outcome. It is time for each individual to search his heart and to purge his mind and purpose of selfish motives. I can conceive that each individual, no matter what class in society he belongs to, whether he be a manufacturer, a farmer, a laborer, a lawyer, or a scientist, will take pains to see that he attain for himself and his operations the highest degree of efficiency and give the maximum service or products to the Nation at the lowest cost consistent with efficient operation and effective standards of living; but it is inconceivable to me that any patriot should aim to do less or to seek more selfish advantage. It is obviously the duty of each civilian to reveal by his conduct the same standards of patriotism, devotion, and sacrifice, if necessary, either of life or property, that we expect from the men whom we send to the front directly to bear the brunt of battle.

I am confident that it is in this spirit that you, all the other agricultural leaders, and the great body of farmers whom we serve, approach the grave tasks confronting the Nation. There can be no turning back. The rights of the Nation must be vindicated and its institutions preserved. Those who would keep the people of the world from going about their business in orderly and decent fashion must be taught a lesson once for all. A finish must be made of all things feudal, humanity must be safeguarded, democracy must be impregably entrenched, the lesson must be forced home that the worthy and tolerable national aspiration is to have a clean household from cellar to attic, and a durable and righteous peace must be secured.

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